

WEAVING; CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR PRISONERS AT WOLAITA SODO PRISON INSTITUTE, SNNPR, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was examining the challenges and opportunities experienced as well as the economic benefits for prisoners engaged on weaving at Wolaita Sodo Prison, Ethiopia. Both qualitative and quantitative research design was employed. Content and descriptive analyses were employed for qualitative and quantitative data respectively. The study population was randomly selected from male convicted prisoners engaged in weaving. Focus group discussion, observation, interviews schedule and key informant interview were conducted to collect primary data. Desk review was employed to gather secondary data. The study found out a number of challenges ranging from insufficient market network, capital and technology, raw material, competition, communication to lack of training support. The opportunities identified were institutional support to possess working premises, market demand for traditional cloths, availability of national and international events organized, and the presence of best practices of Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in Mekele and Arbaminch prisons to carry out skill and financial support. The sector contributed a lot to empower prisoners economically to suffice their financial needs.

Keywords: Economic benefit, weaving, qualitative, quantitative, content analysis, challenges, opportunities

INTRODUCTION

Growing prison populations throughout the world (though not in every country) place an enormous financial burden on governments and at a great cost to the social cohesion of societies. It is estimated that more than 10.2 million people, including sentenced and pre-trial prisoners, were held in penal institutions worldwide (Penal Reform International, 2015).

The vast majority of prisoners in the world are men. In most countries, they tend to be drawn from the poorest strata of the society. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights reported in 2011 that 'disproportionately high numbers of the poorest and most excluded are arrested, detained and imprisoned (UN, 2011).

International law stipulates that imprisonment should not be limited to the deprivation of liberty alone. Rather, it should include opportunities for prisoners to obtain knowledge and skills that can assist them in their successful reintegration upon release, with a view to avoiding future offending. As imprisonment, in itself, is incapable of addressing prisoners' social reintegration issues, the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) requires that "the penitentiary system shall comprise treatment of prisoners the essential aim of which shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation"(UN, 2017).

Providing work for prisoners is important to make their stay in prison more constructive and to help them retain, or sometimes gain for the first time, the motivation needed to follow a regular pattern of activity. In short, work programmes can "stimulate and encourage the culture of work, and to combat idleness in places of deprivation of liberty. In addition, it can open a door to generate additional income so as to lift up their livelihoods situation (UN, 2017).

The handloom sub-sector in Ethiopia is derived from the cotton sub-sector and is an example of a traditional-based and home grown activity. Handloom weaving is a simple value chain activity and is pivotal in the cotton sector as it binds the rural and urban households together and is grown from the home-based traditional handcraft industry. Handloom weaving was established to meet household need and demand for clothing, and then gradually grew to be an additional source of income as a non-farm activity. In fact, handlooms (informal operators) are the major demanders of raw cotton, and are engaged in weaving and preparation of traditional fibers, especially woven dresses that are popular both at the rural and urban centers and are also exported to Ethiopians living abroad (Ayele, et.al, 2009).

The major products of the handloom sector can be divided in to semi-finished fabrics and finished products. While the semi-finished fabrics are usually channeled to the domestic garment factories for further processing, the finished products are divided into traditional clothing categories like netella, gabi, kemis, scarf and kuta which are sold mainly in the

domestic market and to Ethiopians living abroad, and home furnishing textiles, which are destined to the international market (Abdella and Ayele 2008).

According to Cottage/Handicraft Manufacturing Industries Survey, the textiles industry has the second highest number of establishments in the cottage and handicraft manufacturing industry (221,848) in Ethiopia. It represents 23% of the total number of cottage and handicraft enterprises, with almost 55% of these located in rural areas of the country. Across the nation, the textile industry employs the second highest number of people among the cottage and handicraft manufacturing industries, following food products and beverages. This industry accounts for 23% of the total employment in the cottage and handicraft manufacturing industries, and 20% of the rural employment in the cottage and handicraft manufacturing industries. Weaving enterprises make up 73.2% of the textile industry in number of establishments, and 42.8% in total number of workers (CSA, 2003).

The main providers of raw cotton to handlooms are smallholder farmers. Although the handloom industry depends on simple technology and is characterized by low and fluctuating income with no access to markets, finance, and information, it is the most important handicraft group in terms of employment, providing the means of livelihood to the majority of weavers located in rural areas (Ayele, et.al, 2009).

In spite of its poor performance, the cotton sub-sector still offers a unique opportunity for Ethiopia in terms of serving as a bedrock upon which the country can shift to high value added technological transformation following its strong backward and forward linkages with various sectors, and its provision of employment opportunities for the large number of the rural poor. It is against this background that the Government of Ethiopia wishes to take a deliberate effort and action to stimulate the growth and potential of this sub-sector in terms of making cotton one of the major commercial crops in the country (Abdella and Ayele 2008).

The essential aspect of the handloom weaving sector that guided its selection for this study is that it is the most important source of income for prisoners engaged in this sector. Besides, it is also the most important non-agriculture income sector to alleviate poverty for urban and rural poor (CSA, 2003). Thus, it plays pivotal role to ensure urban and rural food security as well as to monitor uncontrolled rural urban migration of people. It has been the focus of many recent industrial development efforts, linked with export markets, e.g. USAID and UNIDO projects, linked in part with the African Growth Opportunities Act (AGOA), which allows concessions on import duty for textiles originating in certain African countries, including Ethiopia. Perhaps most importantly, it is one of the few non-agricultural sectors with a discernable presence in both urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the second Growth and Transformation Plan pays much attention to ensure the employment opportunity and stimulation

of the local economic development out of the sector (National Planning Commission, 2016). This in turn reduces down uncontrolled illegal migration and absorbs the labor force in our country.

In connection to this, it is high time to closely assess the challenges and opportunities of the sector in marginalized areas like prisons that have received little research attention. Although previous studies have tried to pin point challenges and opportunities that are associated at the farm and cluster level in Ethiopia, it is important to investigate the threats and prospects at prison level. Furthermore, due to the increasing demand for handloom products, it is vital to study the relative economic importance of the sector how it is changing the livelihood situation of the prisoners and their families. Therefore the objectives of this study were:

- To investigate challenges that threaten weaving at Wolaita Sodo Prison
- To identify opportunities for prisoners engaged in weaving at Wolaita Sodo Prison
- To estimate the economic benefit obtained out of the sector for prisoners at Wolaita Sodo Prison

METHODOLOGY

Wolaita Sodo prison institute is one of the 23 Prison institutes in SNNPR. It was established in 1929. Recently, it has 1632 prisoners of which 64 are females. There are 875 prisoners engaged in weaving all of whom are males (Prison Report, 2017).

The study was conducted from February to March 2018. A descriptive survey and qualitative research design was employed in the study to examine the main challenges and opportunities as well as the economic benefits obtained from weaving for inmates at Wolaita Sodo prison institute.

The participants for the key informant interviews and focus group discussion were selected purposively. The primary purpose was the experiences and knowledge about hand looming and prisoners entrepreneurial capacity in the area of weaving as pre-defined criteria. The sample size was based on the principle of “data saturation” other than specified number of respondents.

Eighty eight (88) study Participants for quantitative survey were selected via systematic random sampling out of the list of prisoners engaged in weaving at Wolaita Sodo Prison. The sample size was determined by using Yemane’s formula:

All the relevant data or information was generated both from primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected through survey, key informant interviews, observation and focus group discussion. The secondary data was generated through reviewing proclamations and strategies of the country, Wolaita Sodo Prison Strategic Plan (3-5 years

plans) and the yearly/annual reports of the prison, GTP-II, ILO and human rights commission reports of the country.

Once the qualitative and quantitative data collection and document review was completed, the generated data or information was analyzed, summarized and presented. For the qualitative information; editing, coding, and thematic categorization was employed. The analysis was assisted using the idea of Bazeley (2009) that involves thematic analysis (*three key strategies*), including description of data, classification of data, and seeing how concepts interconnect. First the raw data was transcribed as they are; then classified into groups based on their similarities and differences; at the end, a connection was made between the information. The quantitative data was computed descriptively. SPSS version 20 software was utilized for analysis of primary data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of prisoners participated in the current study are depicted in the following table.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Demographic variables	Frequency						Total
	Age	18-34(Youth)		35-64(Adult)			88
		65(73.9%)		23(26.1%)			
	Education	Illiterate	1-8	9-10	11-12	College/ university	88
		2(0.02%)	41(47%)	27(30.7%)	10(11.4%)	6(0.07%)	
	Marital status	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Single		88
		48(54.5%)	1(0.01%)	3(0.03%)	36(40.9%)		
	Family size	1-4	5-8	1			88
		30(34.1%)	22(25%)	36(40.9%)			
	Weaving experience	1-5 years		6-10 years			88
		57(64.8%)		31(35.2%)			
	Residence prior to prison	Rural		Urban			88
		81(92%)		7(8%)			

From the table one can easily understand that the overwhelming majority (73.9%) of the prisoners are youths. Almost 50% of the inmates did not attend high school. The young age together with low level of education might predispose inmates to become jailed which agree with

study conducted in Bangladesh (Muhammad, et.al, 2016). About 92 % of the prisoners are from rural part of Wolaita zone at which up on release they will join their family in rural areas. This business might help them when they are back to their family where the land size is too small for agricultural activities. Thus, it retains the labor force in rural set up during non-agricultural season and spare times in agricultural season so as to generate income for the betterment of their livelihoods.

Challenges Identified

There are various challenges identified in this study. On the basis of Focus group discussion, key informant interview, observation and interview schedule (survey), the challenges faced by prisoners can be depicted hereunder.

Market Network: Poor marketing and insufficient market linkage outside the prison upsets the industry from growing and earning more revenue. Most of the weaving product markets are located in Markato and Arada which are not accessed by the prisoners. On the other hand, most of the customers buy the traditional cloths either from family members, friends, relatives, local collectors, retailers, or whole sealers where the prisoners do not earn the premium price out of their products. Furthermore, they are giving commission for their sellers which downgrade the optimum benefit out of the products they manufacture. This is associated with lack of market premises or shed for prisoners. The finding is similar with studies conducted in different parts of the world (Singh and Joshi, 2017; Rakhin, 2015; Raju, 2012)

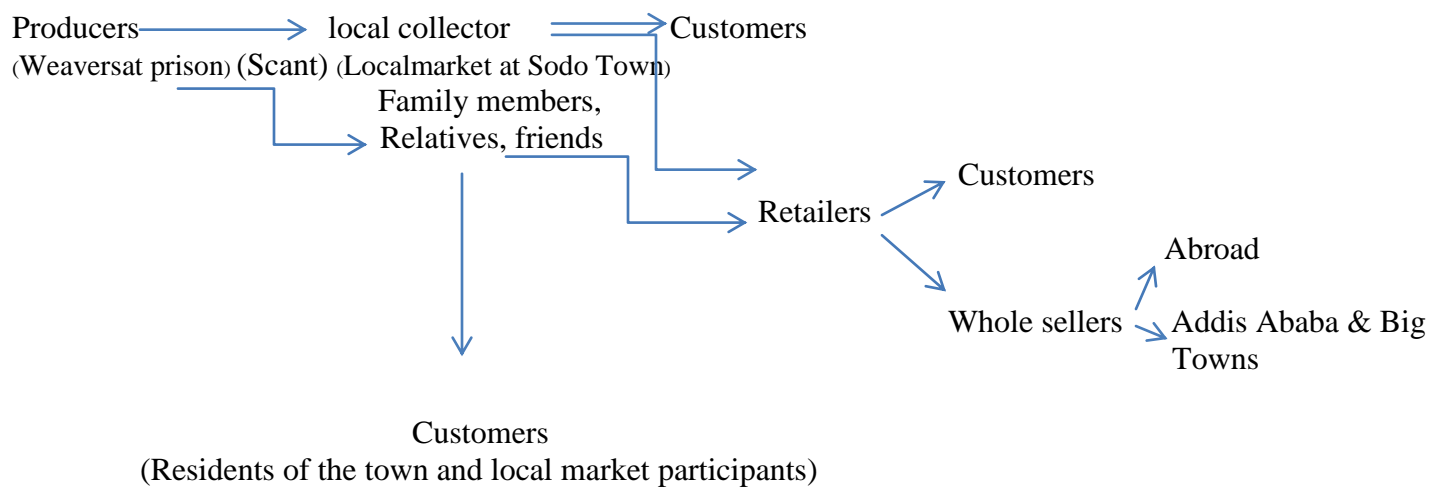


Figure 1: How products marketed/distributed

Capital and Technology: Weavers are suffering from inadequate contemporary technology and scarcity of working capital, which are mandatory to maintain the smooth flow of production.. Most of the time, weavers acquire their working capital from their own and sometimes they acquire capital from their relatives. They are suffering from financial shortage to properly run their business which agrees with previous study in Ethiopia (Ayele, et al 2009).The current credit modality does not allow them to access credit from microfinance institutions as identified during survey, key informant interview and focus group discussion.

Raw material: Mainly the price of the thread is highly expensive which agrees with study conducted in India and Bangladesh (Rakhin, 2015; Muhammad, et.al, 2016). This is related to the current devaluation of the currency as explained by the single supplier of thread/yarn. The overwhelming majority of the study participants claimed that they may terminate the business if the price of the thread continues to inflate.

Competition: Price is high as comparison to power loom products. It is a very cumbersome process and involved labor which increase the cost of preparing it. Cost is the major factor behind the increase in the competition from power loom products.

Communication: Another challenge for prisoners identified in the current study is lack of promotional and advertisement activities and no direct communication is there with the customers or end users to sale their products which agree with the findings in Ethiopia (Ayele, et.al, 2009)and in different parts of the world (Singh and Joshi, 2017; Rakhin, 2015).

Training: one of the expected institutional supports is training. Inadequate training to upgrade skill is also another challenge identified in this study which is in agreement with study conducted in India and Bangladesh (Rakhin, 2015; Muhammad, et.al, 2016).

Opportunities Present

There are huge opportunities present prisoners.

Institutional support: The 2008 TVET strategy and PROCLAMATION NO 391/2004 of Ethiopia aim to provide more opportunities to a wider range of different target groups. In addition to school leavers, the TVET system has been planned to address school drop-outs, people without formal education, including illiterate or least educated people; farmers and their families; unemployed people who need initial TVET or retraining to support their reintegration into the

labor market; people with disabilities, people from marginalized ethnic groups and other groups like prisoners. Besides, tailor made training module of the SNNPR on weaving is taken as an opportunity for prisoners engaged in weaving to acquire the skill required for the sector. The existence of textile, garment and leather department with the relevant professional at Sodo Poly Technique College, microfinance institutions, cooperative office, appropriate zonal departments and non-governmental organizations is taken as a golden opportunity if they are working in collaboration to support prisoners engaged in weaving.

Market demand: the current market demand for the traditional clothes such as netela, gabi and scarf is high in local market, big cities like Addis Ababa and abroad. This is one of the opportunities for prisoners to manufacture the fabrics locally.

Availability of different National and International Events: Organizing various events in different cities of the country with the support of government and corporates in the form of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) to promote the cultural/traditional cloths can be a great opportunity for inmates engaged in weaving. These events may create an opportunity to innovate the design of traditional cloths for fashion show and can be categorized for economy class to premium customers including tourists.

Availability of best practices: The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in Ethiopia has been created sustainable livelihoods opportunity for women and youths to reduce poverty via skill training and revolving financial support in collaboration with Dedbit and Omo microfinances as implemented in Mekele and Arbaminch prison institutes. This kind of practice will create an opportunity to acquire skill and financial support for prisoners if the scheme is introduced to Wolaita Sodo prison institute.

Economic Benefit

The sector has led to a high level of income and asset accumulation for the prisoners. This sector is viewed as the venue for generation of income to change the livelihood situation of the prisoners and their families at which they invested in human capital development (educating their families), saved money, invested in agricultural inputs among others as depicted in the tables hereunder. Similar findings in different parts agreed with this study (Singh and Joshi, 2017; Rakhin, 2015, Raju, 2012).

Table 2: Assets accumulated by prisoners

S n	Type of Assets	Average size	Possess	Do not possess	Remark
1	Saving	5220 birr	71	17	
2	Livestock(ox, cow)	.76 TLU	47	41	
3	House/land	200 m ² land at town	13	75	For building their house

Table 3: the type of expenditure carried on by prisoners

S.N	Purpose of expense	Average money invested per annum in birr	No of prisoners	Remark
1	Schooling	630	73	
2	Health care	540	57	
3	Family support	1200	67	Mainly for food
4	Clothing	600	80	
5	Agricultural inputs(improved seed, fertilizer)	1400	81	
6	Social affair (Wedding, funeral, male circumcision, Edir)	520	83	

From table 1 and table 2, it is possible to comprehend that weaving has contributed for the majority of prisoners to accumulate assets like saving (finance), to possess livestock and enable them to have fixed asset like house and land for construction of house. The economic contribution of this informal sector is also extended to maintain the social affair like wedding, among others. Furthermore, the sector has also enabled prisoners to finance school fees for the family members; support family monetary wise; inject money for purchase of agricultural inputs and cloths for themselves and their family. Therefore, this sector is taken as a ladder to escape both urban and rural abject poverty where land size is small in densely populated areas like Wolaita.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The contribution of small firms towards employment and earnings has been a concern for policy makers of countries like Ethiopia. Many policy instruments have been employed to promote the growth of small firms in developing countries. These instruments include credit support, subsidies for the use of certain inputs; advice on technology, production, and marketing;

reservation of certain products for exclusion of production by small firms and exemption from excise and sales tax. Similar modalities are required to motivate the prisoners to enter in to various income generating activities like weaving to make them more productive than criminals. This study has identified poor market network and absence of market shed, lack of promotion and advertisement, raw material, training, finance and contemporary technology as main challenges threatening weaving at prison institute. It identified institutional support, the presence of market demand and presence of national and international events like fashion show together with availability of best practices as the opportunities for weavers at prison institute. The contribution of weaving to change the livelihoods situation of prisoners was also investigated in the current study. The findings clearly indicated that future consideration for institutional intervention with provision of technological, financial among various capacity building supports to improve the efficiency of this informal sector will be taken as a requirement. Besides, efforts will be exerted to improve the innovativeness and standardization of the sector to boost up its productivity. Thus, there is a need to conduct further studies in innovativeness and branding of traditional cloths made by people like inmates.

On the bases of the above facts, the following points are recommended:

- Policy instruments like credit modality, advice of technology, production and marketing together with subsidies of inputs like yarn should be designed to support marginalized group of people like prisoners
- Intersectoral collaboration to support and motivate prisoners engaged in weaving by providing working and marketing premises, trainings among others has to be carried out.

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